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RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

[on the report of the Second Committee (A/47/723)]

47/199. Triennial policy review of the operational activities for development within the United Nations system

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 44/211 of 22 December 1989 and 46/219 of 20 December 1991, and other relevant resolutions,

Concerned that the full and coordinated implementation of resolution 44/211 has not been achieved by the United Nations system,

Noting with concern that, while some progress has been made in implementing parts of its resolution 44/211, both by individual organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and by coordination mechanisms of the system, many of the provisions of that resolution have still to be implemented,

Urging developed countries, in particular those countries whose overall performance is not commensurate with their capacity, taking into account established official development assistance targets, including targets established at the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 1/ and current levels of contribution, to increase their official development assistance substantially, including contributions to the operational activities of the United Nations system,

Stressing that national plans and priorities constitute the only viable frame of reference for the national programming of operational activities for development within the United Nations system,

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1/ See Report of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Paris, 3-14 September 1990 (A/CONF.147/18), part one.

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Stressing also that the fundamental characteristics of the operational activities of the United Nations system should be, inter alia, their universal, voluntary and grant nature, neutrality and multilateralism, and the ability to respond to the needs of the developing countries in a flexible manner, and that the operational activities of the United Nations system are carried out for the benefit of the developing countries, at the request of those countries and in accordance with their own policies and priorities for development,

Reaffirming that the operational activities for development within the United Nations system have a critical and unique role to play in enabling developing countries to take a lead role in the management of their own development process,

Stressing further that, in order to achieve the objective set out above, processes and procedures of the United Nations system should be streamlined and rationalized, especially in the interrelated areas of programming, execution, decentralization, monitoring and evaluation, thus making the United Nations system more relevant and responsive to the national plans, priorities and objectives of developing countries and more efficient in its delivery systems,

Emphasizing the importance it attaches to a more effective and coherent coordinated approach by the United Nations system to the needs of recipient countries, particularly at the field level,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the United Nations system; 2/

2. Reaffirms its resolution 44/211 and stresses the need to implement all the elements of that resolution in a coherent manner, keeping in mind their interlinkages;

3. Stresses the need for a substantial increase in resources for operational activities for development on a predictable, continuous and assured basis, commensurate with the increasing needs of developing countries;

4. Reaffirms the need for priority allocation of scarce grant resources to programmes and projects in low-income countries, particularly the least developed countries;

5. Stresses the need for an overall improvement of the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations system in delivering its development assistance;

2/ See A/47/419 and Add.1-3.

6. Also stresses that, in the context of the administrative reform of the Secretariat and the restructuring and revitalization of the intergovernmental process, the mandates of the separate sectoral and specialized entities, funds, programmes and specialized agencies should be respected and enhanced, taking into account their complementarities;

7. Emphasizes that the recipient Government has the primary responsibility for coordinating, on the basis of national strategies and priorities, all types of external assistance, including that provided by multilateral organizations, in order effectively to integrate the assistance into its development process;

8. Reaffirms that the multisectoral, sectoral and/or subsectoral strategies prepared by the recipient countries, on the basis of priorities identified by them, should provide a coherent and coordinated programme framework for all external assistance;

9. Stresses that, on the basis of the priorities and plans of recipient countries, and in order to ensure the effective integration of assistance provided by the United Nations system into the development process of countries, with enhanced accountability, and to facilitate the assessment and evaluation of the impact and sustainability of that assistance, a country strategy note should be formulated by interested recipient Governments, with the assistance of and in cooperation with the United Nations system, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, in all recipient countries where the Government so chooses, taking into account the following:

(a) The country strategy note should outline the contribution the operational activities for development within the United Nations system could make to respond to the requirements identified by recipient countries in their plans, strategies and priorities;

(b) The contribution of the United Nations system to the country strategy note should be formulated under the leadership of the resident coordinator, in order to promote greater coordination and cooperation at the field level;

(c) The country strategy note should be transmitted to the governing body of each funding organization as a reference for the consideration of its specific country programme;

(d) The specific activities of each funding organization of the United Nations system, within the broad framework of the country strategy note, should be outlined in a specific country programme prepared by the recipient Government with the assistance of the funding organizations;

10. Reaffirms that, within the context of the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, the funding organizations of the United Nations system, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme and the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the funds administered by the United Nations Development Programme should harmonize their cycles and, where appropriate, adapt them to national budget cycles, plans and strategies;

11. Decides that assistance should be based on an agreed division of responsibility among the funding organizations, under the coordination of the Government, in order to integrate their response into the development needs of

recipient countries;

12. Takes note of decision 92/23 of 26 May 1992 3/ and of all other relevant decisions of the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme regarding the programme approach;

13. Requests the Secretary-General to promote an early agreement on a common interpretation of the programme approach, including an effective methodology for evaluation, to be applied by the United Nations system, with due regard to country-specific circumstances, and to report thereon to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1993;

14. Requests the Economic and Social Council to examine the report mentioned above at its substantive session of 1993 and to determine whether effective and coordinated actions are being taken on the matter by the United Nations system dealing with development;

15. Reiterates that national execution should be the norm for programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system, taking into account the needs and capacities of recipient countries;

16. Also reiterates that it is the principal responsibility of recipient countries to determine their capacity to execute programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system;

17. Stresses the need for the United Nations system to strengthen its capacity to provide policy and technical support and advice at the request of recipient countries;

18. Also stresses the urgent need for the United Nations system to give increased priority to assisting recipient countries in building and/or enhancing the capacity necessary to undertake national execution, including the provision of support services, as required, at the field level;

19. Recognizes the important role of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system within their specific areas of competence and the need for a clear division of labour in facilitating and providing the necessary technical and substantive expertise for programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system;

20. Requests the Economic and Social Council, through the Commission on Science and Technology for Development at its session in 1993, to consider the report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the United Nations system as a means to examine the contribution of the operational activities of the United Nations system to the enhancement of the national capacities of developing countries in the field of science and technology, and to make appropriate recommendations thereon;

3/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1992, Supplement No. 8 (E/1992/28), annex I.

21. Takes note of decision 92/22 of 26 May 1992 3/ and of all other relevant decisions of the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme regarding the definition of programme/project execution and implementation concepts;

22. Requests the Secretary-General to promote an early agreement on a common interpretation of national execution to be applied by the United Nations system and to report thereon to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1993;

23. Requests the Economic and Social Council to examine the report mentioned above at its substantive session of 1993 and to determine whether effective and coordinated actions are being taken on the matter by the United Nations system dealing with development;

24. Decides that, in order to enhance coherence in programming and resource utilization, programme development and component approval, capacity and authority should be further decentralized to the field offices, which should be provided with the necessary technical and substantive expertise;

25. Strongly urges, in this context, that governing bodies of all funds, programmes and specialized agencies should ensure that the prescribed limits on field level authority for cancelling, modifying and adding activities within approved programmes and for shifting resources within approved budget lines of individual components of a programme and among components of a programme, with the approval of national authorities, should be expanded to become equal and uniform, to the maximum extent possible, in the context of enhanced accountability;

26. Stresses that the United Nations system should use, to the fullest extent possible, available national expertise and indigenous technologies;

27. Also stresses that the procurement of expertise and equipment and the placing of fellowships should be decentralized to the country level to the maximum extent possible to avoid delays, reflect national needs and ensure cost-effectiveness, and stresses further that, in this context, the procurement of expertise and equipment should be decentralized, with due regard to the principles of international competitive bidding, while acknowledging the commitment to increase substantially procurement from developing countries and the need for effective accountability mechanisms;

28. Acknowledges the commitment to procurement from underutilized major donor countries, in accordance with the principles of international competitive bidding;

29. Stresses that common formats, rules and procedures are critical to meet the requirements of the shift to a programme approach, and that all formats, rules and procedures and periodicity of reports should be simplified and harmonized to promote national capacity-building, so as to assist the Government to integrate external assistance from different sources into its development process;

30. Decides that the financial and programme auditing capacity and accounting systems of recipient Governments should be strengthened, with assistance from the United Nations system, as requested by Governments;

31. Also decides that, within the context of the programme approach, formats designed for programme, programme component and project development, monitoring and evaluation should take into account interrelated and cross-sectoral linkages between individual strategies of recipient countries and between the individual components of a strategy;

32. Further decides that budgeting and related rules, procedures, processes and formats should be redefined to become, within the context of the sustainability of programmes supported by the United Nations system and their components and projects, oriented towards output, impact or performance rather than towards input or supply, and that, accordingly, evaluation and monitoring systems should be reoriented, while the use of evaluation and monitoring findings should be strengthened, thereby creating a feedback system;

33. Requests inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, to give priority to simplifying, harmonizing and increasing the transparency of their procedures relating to programme component and project formulation, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, taking into account the need to focus on the impact and sustainability of projects and programmes, and to reach agreement on a common United Nations system-wide manual for such procedures by 1 July 1994;

34. Also requests the members of inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, to put in place as soon as possible, and no later than 1 January 1995, measures to enhance accountability at the field level, including effective harmonized programme monitoring, evaluation and management audit systems;

35. Stresses the need for funds and programmes to take into account the decisions of the General Assembly on auditing standards;

36. Also stresses that the strengthened resident coordinator function is necessary to assist the Government in mobilizing technical expertise from both inside and outside the United Nations system and ensuring coordination at the country level through, inter alia, the country strategy note, in order to respond to national needs and priorities in the most cost-effective and efficient manner and to maximize the impact of the United Nations system on the development process;

37. Further stresses that, in order to achieve the objective set out above, particular attention should be paid in the selection of the resident coordinators to quality, relevant broad development experience, managerial and team-building skills, and the capacity to integrate individual components and strategies into the overall development process of the country, as well as to develop effective and coherent coordination by the United Nations system as a whole;

38. Emphasizes that an effectively functioning resident coordinator system will be dependent on a number of factors, including the following:

(a) The separate funds, programmes and specialized agencies must make a commitment to work together to integrate assistance provided by the United Nations system into the development process of the recipient countries in a fully coordinated manner;

(b) The United Nations system at the country level should be tailored, taking into account the views of the recipient Government, to the specific developmental needs of the country in such a way that they correspond to ongoing and projected cooperation programmes rather than to the institutional structure of the United Nations;

(c) The separate identities and, where appropriate, representation of funds and programmes at the country level should be ensured in the framework of a clear and improved division of labour, in accordance with their mandates;

(d) The resident coordinator should, if required, establish close cooperation with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies at the regional and subregional levels, in order to respond to specific requests by recipient Governments;

(e) In strengthening the resident coordinator system, the creation of an additional bureaucratic layer should be avoided;

39. Requests the Secretary-General, with due regard to General Assembly resolutions 34/213 of 19 December 1979 and 46/182 of 19 December 1991 and paragraph 38 above, to strengthen the resident coordinator system with the aim of:

(a) Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations system at the field level, through a fully coordinated multidisciplinary approach to the needs of recipient countries under the leadership of the resident coordinator, bearing in mind the complementarity of the system and the need for a division of labour within the respective spheres of competence of individual specialized agencies, programmes and funds;

(b) Establishing, in consultation with recipient Governments, a clearer division of responsibilities for the resident coordinator and individual funds, programmes and specialized agencies;

(c) Ensuring that, in the context of the country strategy note, where in place, representatives of the members of the Joint Consultative Group on Policies at the field level and, in due course, of all funds, programmes and specialized agencies with field operations inform, consult with and take account of any views of the resident coordinator in the context of major programming exercises before reporting to their headquarters on major programming and policy issues;

(d) Widening the pool of qualified development professionals eligible for appointment as United Nations Development Programme resident representatives/resident coordinators to include the members of the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, together with increased transparency in the selection process;

(e) Encouraging individual specialized agencies at the field level to participate fully in all aspects of the resident coordinator system;

(f) Defining the responsibility of the relevant inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the Joint Consultative Group on Policies, in close consultation with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, for providing clear guidance to resident coordinators and for ensuring that they are provided with the necessary support both at the headquarters level and in the field;

(g) Enhancing the responsibility and authority of the resident coordinator for the planning and coordination of programmes as well as allowing him or her to propose, in full consultation with the Government, to the heads of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the amendment of country programmes and major projects and programmes, where required, to bring them into line with the country strategy note;

40. Calls upon resident coordinators to take the necessary steps, in those countries where the scale of the activities of the United Nations and the number of funds, programmes and specialized agencies so justify, to establish, in consultation with host Governments, an appropriate field-level committee, which will normally comprise all resident United Nations system representatives and which, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, will serve as a United Nations coordinating mechanism in the countries concerned;

41. Calls upon the coordinating mechanism mentioned above, in consultation with the host Government, to undertake advisory functions including, inter alia, the provision of guidance and advice on proposed programmes of funding organizations, the review of agency sector strategies and evaluations and the investigation of specific problems and issues requiring a coordinated response;

42. Welcomes the decision of the Joint Consultative Group on Policies to set a target for increasing the number of common premises, while emphasizing that this should be achieved in cooperation with host Governments in a way that increases efficiency through, inter alia, consolidation of administrative infrastructures of organizations concerned, without increasing the costs for the United Nations system or for developing countries;

43. Emphasizes the necessity of continuing to develop common innovative and integrated system-wide training programmes, at Headquarters and, especially, at the field level, while taking into account the use of regional cooperation arrangements, for government officials and other nationals, as well as for the staff of the United Nations system field offices, to facilitate the shift from the project to the programme approach and to promote effective and innovative execution modalities;

44. Also emphasizes that those training programmes should be joint and common, include on-the-job training, involve the establishment of a training capacity internal to each country, including a scheme for the training of national trainers, and be provided on a continuous basis as an integral function of the United Nations system field office structure;

45. Stresses that those training programmes should aim to develop capacities, especially in the areas of the programme approach, national execution, programme accountability and financial audit, support costs and evaluation and monitoring;

46. Urges the United Nations system to give appropriate attention to establishing and maintaining national institutional expertise, particularly in the areas mentioned in paragraph 45 above, through, inter alia, the increased participation in training programmes of national staff and members of relevant national institutions;

47. Reaffirms the importance of human development, including human resources development, and requests the United Nations system to strengthen the support given by its operational activities for development, at the request of recipient countries, to sectors vital to human development;

48. Recognizes that the United Nations system has a role to play in assisting countries that are undergoing deep economic and social reforms;

49. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure that the operational activities for development within the United Nations system carried out in new recipient countries are undertaken, from the outset, on the basis of an integrated, unified, cost-effective and innovative approach to development cooperation and presence in the countries concerned and to ensure effective support to them, while ensuring that such support is not to the detriment of existing programmes for developing countries;

50. Stresses the need for the Economic and Social Council to examine the operational activities of the United Nations system with a view to ensuring implementation of the present resolution and making recommendations thereon;

51. Calls upon the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to take appropriate action for the full implementation of the present resolution, and requests the executive heads of those funds, programmes and specialized agencies to submit a yearly progress report to their governing bodies on measures taken and to be taken for its implementation;

52. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure that the provisions of the present resolution are fully implemented by all the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system;

53. Also requests the Secretary-General, after consultations with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, to present to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1993 an appropriate management process containing clear guidelines, targets, benchmarks and time-frames for the full implementation of the present resolution;

54. Further requests the Secretary-General to submit to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive sessions of 1993 and 1994 a progress report on the implementation of the present resolution, incorporating, inter alia, the reports mentioned in paragraph 51 above to be prepared by the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system;

55. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, through the Economic and Social Council, in the context of the triennial policy review, a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the present resolution and to make appropriate recommendations.

93rd plenary meeting
22 December 1992